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SUBJECT: USG-FUNDED WORKER RIGHTS CENTERS OPEN IN IZABAL

REF: A. GUATEMALA 253

[1](#)B. 08 GUATEMALA 1502

[1](#)1. Summary: On May 28, Emboffs attended the inauguration of two Worker Rights Centers in the Department of Izabal as part of the DOL-funded project, "Campo a Campo:Trabajando con dignidad." The three-year project is implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its local partner, the Social Pastoral Division of the Apostolic Vicariate of Izabal (Social Pastorate). It seeks to provide legal and other support services to agricultural workers, as well as increase collaboration and information sharing among local labor-related organizations. This project is targeted at an area of Guatemala with a large number of agricultural workers, a sizable indigenous Q'eqchi' population, and a tradition of short-term employment, all social factors that contribute to an abnormally high number of labor rights violations. End Summary.

[1](#)2. The inauguration of the two Worker Rights Centers was held in Puerto Barrios and featured remarks by Vice Minister of Labor Mario Roberto Illescas Aguirre; Monsignor Gabriel Penate of Social Pastorate; Lucrecia Lopez Lopez of Catholic Relief Services; Eugenia Juarez Xol, Local Coordinator of the Centers and a Q'eqchi' lawyer; Selfa Sandoval of the Banana Workers' Union of Izabal (SITRABI); Morales' parish priest Daniel Vogt; and Emboff. Attending the inauguration were members of worker organizations, employers, regional and central Ministry of Labor representatives, and affiliates of CRS.

[1](#)3. The two Centers, located in El Estor and in Puerto Barrios, cover four municipalities in the department and will provide information about labor rights to workers visiting the centers and, through outreach education, to 80 target communities. The Centers will assist workers in documenting labor rights violations by recording the complaints in a data collection system compatible with that of the regional Ministry of Labor office. The Centers will also provide follow-up for individual cases, as necessary. All services will be provided at no cost. The project further seeks to create the Izabal Worker Rights Network, a local service network comprised of key stakeholders, such as Ministry of Labor officials, farmers' and civic groups, labor unions, and special interest groups to address labor rights issues throughout the Department.

[1](#)4. Comment: These Centers should provide an improved incentive for workers to file grievances for labor rights violations and may promote enforcement of labor laws. They build on the Centers already open in Chimaltenango under the "Todos y Todas Trabajamos" project (reftels), also funded by DOL and implemented by CRS. However, the two Centers in Izabal are focused specifically on workers in the agricultural sector. They will fill a gap in the dissemination of worker rights information in the area and reduce the amount of time spent by the regional and central

offices of the Ministry of Labor and the labor court system
on invalid or undocumented claims.
Lindwall